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Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2301 (2016), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2017 and requested me to report on a quarterly basis on its implementation. The present report is submitted pursuant to that resolution.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The political context continued to be marred by an upsurge in violence that began around Bangassou and Bria in May, contributing to a deterioration in the security situation throughout much of the country. Criticism of the Government became more pronounced, and several opposition figures openly challenged the leadership of the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera, portraying the Government as incapable of ensuring stability. Some political and civil society actors criticized MINUSCA for not forcibly disarming armed groups, calling for the rearmament of the unreformed national armed forces. Rising divisive rhetoric, employed by some national actors, contributed to an increase in sectarian tensions, especially in the south-east, where Muslims in general, particularly Fulani, were targeted. Attacks were carried out along ethnic and confessional lines by increasingly fractured and unorganized armed actors loosely affiliated with anti-balaka or ex-Séléka factions. Lingering strains between the executive and legislative branches of government compounded the situation.

3. In that context, on 19 September I co-chaired with President Touadera and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and in partnership with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the European Union and the World Bank, a high-level meeting on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, held on the margins of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Participants strongly condemned attacks against civilians, expressed support for President Touadera's efforts and reaffirmed their support for the African Initiative for Peace and

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Reconciliation. It was agreed that a meeting of the International Support Group on the Central African Republic would be convened within six months.

4. Before the high-level meeting, President Touadera took steps aimed at overcoming domestic political tensions. On 12 September, he appointed 16 new ministers to an expanded Cabinet of 34 portfolios, including 18 members of the previous Government. The appointees included four representatives of armed groups and five Muslims, increasing the number of Muslim representatives to eight. In terms of gender, there were five women among the appointees, up from four previously but representing an overall decrease in the proportion of women in the Cabinet. This effort broadens the Government's political base and may calm sectarian tensions and create an environment more conducive to the peace process. The creation of 11 new ministries will place an additional burden on the State's budget.

5. The Cabinet reshuffle was coupled with initiatives to create conditions to extend State authority. The national strategy for the restoration of State authority was adopted on 8 September. Four days later, the President appointed new prefects to all 16 prefectures, nine of whom have a military background. Although no members of the Muslim community were among the new prefects, the 73 subprefects appointed on 18 September were more ethnically diverse and included several active members of ex-Séléka groups, 21 members of the armed forces and 6 women.

6. In a context of increasing violence, discussions with armed groups continued within the framework of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, albeit with limited progress. At several meetings held during the reporting period, national authorities challenged armed groups on the prevailing insecurity while engaging them in direct dialogue. Despite the participation of the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) in the Committee, the group continued to seize new territory and build new military structures, announcing the deployment to Bria and Kaga Bandoro of new "mixed" brigades comprising elements from the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC). It was not yet clear whether the inclusion of FPRC members in the Government would lead to a reduction in the latter's destabilizing military activities.

7. Although the political context remained fragile, steps were taken towards a broader, inclusive peace process. On 19 June, representatives of the Government and 13 armed groups signed an accord under the auspices of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome establishing a ceasefire regime, among other measures. In the days following, violent clashes erupted between many of the signatories to the accord, weakening public faith in it. On 21 June in Brussels, the Government and all mediation actors, including members of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and the Community of Sant'Egidio, agreed to adopt a single road map for a broader mediation process. International partners affirmed their support for the Government's efforts to secure an immediate cessation of violence.

8. On 17 July in Libreville, representatives of the African Union, ECCAS and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Angola, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo and Gabon, adopted an integrated road map for the African Initiative. The road map reaffirms the legitimacy of the country's constitutional system, the importance of the conclusions reached at the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, held in 2015, and the need for strong national ownership of the peace process to promote reconciliation. On 29 August, the African Union Commission appointed Bédializoun Moussa Nébié as its Special Representative for the Central African Republic.

9. The panel of facilitators of the African Initiative met in Bangui on 11 and 12 September to develop a plan to advance the road map. Chaired by the African Union and bringing together representatives of the Initiative's members, the panel seeks to facilitate direct engagement between the parties. The Government announced that Jean Willybiro-Sako would serve as the national focal point for the Panel.

10. The relationship between the executive and legislative branches gradually improved. President Touadera and the President of the National Assembly publicly committed themselves to positive, mutual cooperation in a joint appearance in July. Following a series of consultations with a broad cross section of national stakeholders, the National Assembly proposed its "Parliamentary Peace Initiative" to the Government to contribute to the peace process. Although the ordinary session of the National Assembly was in recess during the reporting period, parliamentarians actively prepared for the next legislative cycle. Efforts included a review of decentralization reforms in July, supported by the National Democratic Institute, and an interparliamentary seminar held in July with parliamentarians from the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon, organized by the International Organization of la Francophonie.

11. Social cohesion and reconciliation efforts suffered severe setbacks during the reporting period. The volatile security situation eroded the ability and the willingness of communities to take steps towards reconciliation. Cycles of reprisal took place between non-Muslim communities and Fulani and other Muslim communities in Bangassou, Zemio and other areas. Promising local initiatives to overcome sectarian and ethnic divisions were undertaken in Bria, Kaga Bandoro and other localities, although the implementation of agreements brokered by local peace committees was uneven. Most reconciliation efforts were unable to make a tangible impact on social cohesion and the situation of displaced communities. The Government took important actions, including the adoption of a national reconciliation programme on 11 September. The same day, President Touadera created a committee to lead consultations on the establishment of a truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation commission, a priority identified at the Bangui Forum.

B. Security situation

12. While the situation remained relatively calm in Bangui, armed confrontations and violence against civilians prevailed throughout the rest of the country, especially in the south-east, the centre and parts of the west (Ouham and Ouham-Pendé prefectures). The violence was driven by increased competition among armed groups over the control of resources, which was increasingly aggravated by inter-ethnic and intercommunal tensions, particularly between Muslims and Christians. New armed formations emerged, fuelling clashes and attacks on civilians. The onset of the rainy season did not quell their activities. In the centre and the east, many incidents involved criminal activities and attacks against Muslim communities by anti-balaka groups. The resources of MINUSCA were stretched thin, particularly in the south-east, although the Mission continually adjusted its posture to prevent or mitigate the worst consequences of violence for civilians.

13. Armed groups repeatedly targeted peacekeepers during the reporting period, primarily along the Alindao-Zemio axis. The majority of those attacks were perpetrated by anti-balaka groups and their affiliates, who challenge the Mission's active protection of displaced ethnic Fulani and Muslim minorities. The attacks were planned and coordinated in advance, revealing the growing use of modern weaponry and communications. More than half of them occurred in Bangassou,

killing 3 peacekeepers and injuring 12 others. On 21 August, the anti-balaka faction of Maxime Mokom issued a communiqué stating that it would take necessary action if MINUSCA did not expel "foreign mercenaries" from the country. The declaration was publicly condemned by the Government.

14. Increased intercommunal tensions and agitation against Fulani sparked cycles of violence against civilians in Bangassou, Bria and Zemio. The anti-balaka forces and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) both deliberately targeted civilians from opposing communities.

15. In Bangassou, anti-balaka groups continued to dominate the town and harass internally displaced persons, Muslims and women. The abduction on 21 July of a pregnant internally displaced Muslim woman by anti-balaka elements triggered the abduction of six Christian civilians by Muslim displaced persons. All abductees were released the next day, following mediation efforts led by the local Catholic priest. On 23 and 25 July, anti-balaka elements attacked a MINUSCA water convoy, killing three peacekeepers and injuring four others. MINUSCA exchanged fire with anti-balaka forces on 29 occasions in that area between June and 1 October.

16. A series of attacks and counter-attacks in the village of Gambo, carried out by anti-balaka elements against UPC and armed Fulani individuals, took place between 3 and 9 August, resulting in the killing of at least 60 civilians and 22 UPC members. A reprisal attack carried out by UPC with other ex-Seleka fighters and armed Fulani on 5 August targeted the local health centre, resulting in the deaths of at least 45 civilians, including at least 10 volunteers of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

17. The presence of large anti-balaka groups on a main road to Bria and ongoing criminal activities by anti-balaka and FPRC units threatened the city. On 17 June, anti-balaka forces and FPRC engaged in heavy clashes along the Bria-Yalinga axis, leading to the death of FPRC faction leader Hamad Issa. FPRC attacked the Banda community in retaliation on 18 June, while anti-balaka elements attacked the mostly Arab Mandé district. Those clashes left at least 58 combatants dead and numerous houses and offices of non-governmental organizations destroyed or looted. Some 40,000 people, including many members of anti-balaka factions, sought refuge at the camp for internally displaced persons near MINUSCA. The clashes and the looting forced all humanitarian actors to leave the city. FPRC continued its efforts to reunify ex-Séléka factions, despite violent divisions between factions that had complicated those efforts.

18. Violent clashes between anti-balaka elements and armed Muslim groups erupted in Zemio on 28 and 29 June, temporarily displacing some 5,000 people. On 11 July, anti-balaka forces attacked the town's hospital, which is supported by Médecins sans frontières, reportedly killing 10 people. All humanitarian actors withdrew from Zemio, leaving approximately 23,000 internally displaced persons without humanitarian assistance.

19. During the reporting period, the number of attacks attributed to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) decreased compared with the same period in 2016. Since June, 12 incidents have been attributed to alleged LRA elements, with 4 persons killed and some 35 abducted.

20. Armed groups continued to clash and to attack civilians, MINUSCA and humanitarian actors in the centre of the country. In Ouaka prefecture, the killing of a UPC fighter in Ngakobo on 6 June heightened tensions. In Basse-Kotto prefecture, anti-balaka factions repeatedly targeted MINUSCA patrols. After being attacked on 4 June, MINUSCA engaged anti-balaka fighters in the vicinity of Alindao, resulting in the killing of three armed individuals and the capture of two. On 14 June,

anti-balaka elements attacked a MINUSCA convoy on the Mobaye-Kongbo axis and subsequently fired on MINUSCA convoys four more times, injuring two peacekeepers. Following a series of anti-balaka provocations and attacks against their communities, Muslim youth took up arms in Alindao and Dembe, establishing links with ex-Séléka factions. While ex-Séléka groups did not directly attack MINUSCA, they fuelled tensions in many areas and attacked civilians.

21. In Kaga Bandoro, both anti-balaka elements and the FPRC/MPC coalition repeatedly threatened civilians, including internally displaced persons. The coalition revived "mixed" brigades, which arbitrarily arrested civilians on several occasions in July and August. On 1 July, MPC units attacked a displaced persons' camp, MINUSCA and humanitarian actors, forcing more than 1,100 civilians to flee and leading humanitarian actors to suspend the provision of assistance in Kaga Bandoro.

22. Armed groups clashed repeatedly in attempts to expand their territory. In June, in Ouham-Pendé prefecture, MPC attacked civilians, including women and humanitarian aid workers, as it expanded westward towards Ngaoundaye, a strategic location on a major cattle migration corridor towards Cameroon and Chad. On 22 June, the group detained an International Organization for Migration (IOM) truck south of Paoua, releasing it following a ransom payment. Anti-balaka elements kidnapped four staff members of an international non-governmental organization on 24 July in the village of Pakale (10 km north of Bocaranga) in retaliation for the earlier arrest of one of their fighters by MINUSCA. While the anti-balaka elements subsequently released the hostages, they continued to threaten MINUSCA and humanitarian actors in Bocaranga, demanding the release of their detained colleague. The expansion of the MPC and Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R) armed groups triggered clashes in July with local anti-balaka elements in Bang, Bele and Nzoro, displacing some 1,500 people.

23. In Ouham prefecture, a tripartite dialogue among MPC, anti-balaka elements and leaders of the Fulani community resulted in a ceasefire agreement on 15 June and a commitment to end attacks against civilians. Following a brief lull in violence, criminal and armed group activities resumed in July. Throughout August and September, the area of influence of MPC expanded towards Cameroon. The conflict appeared to increasingly assume identity-based dynamics with the outbreak of serious clashes between 3R and anti-balaka elements in Nana-Mambéré prefecture. In contrast, in Kouki, Ouham prefecture, communities respected a voluntary non-aggression pact signed on 15 June.

24. Security in Bangui remained largely calm, although armed groups linked to anti-balaka, ex-Séléka and so-called "self-defence" groups caused occasional insecurity. In the predominantly Muslim PK5 district, they threatened community leaders, harassed local traders and taxi drivers, levied illegal taxes and kidnapped local residents. Efforts by anti-balaka groups to gain control of parts of PK5 slowed the return of internally displaced persons.

III. Progress in implementing resolution 2301 (2016)

25. In the light of the stalled political process and the deteriorating security situation, MINUSCA focused its efforts on local dialogue, the protection of civilians and the prevention of violence. It continued its efforts to persuade armed groups to cease hostilities and honour their commitments to engage in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation, while supporting community violence reduction initiatives. MINUSCA used its good offices to encourage the Government and other stakeholders to build more inclusive governance mechanisms in order to foster an environment more conducive to national consensus and political progress.

A. Immediate priorities

Protection of civilians

26. MINUSCA intensified its efforts to ensure greater flexibility and robustness in order to address expanding threats against civilians, increasing population displacements and rising intercommunal tensions. It adjusted its deployment and strengthened civil-military coordination, in close collaboration with humanitarian organizations. The civil-military response focused on protecting civilians, supporting local mediation efforts and carrying out advocacy with armed groups.

27. To address the security vacuum in the east following the withdrawal of the African Union Regional Task Force, MINUSCA recalibrated its forces. An additional infantry company was deployed in Bria. The deployment of an engineering company was postponed so that the Mission could deploy an additional company in Bangui, which enabled it to dispatch additional detachments outside the city as needed. The area of responsibility of the contingent in the south-east was adjusted and its headquarters relocated from Bria to Bangassou. The special forces unit and the quick-reaction force rotated in deployment to secure the Bambari and Bangassou areas, while addressing emerging hotspots. The entire reserve of the Force Commander and parts of contingents in Bangui were redeployed to hotspots in the centre and the east. Meanwhile, a 450-strong battalion was deployed in the west to replace the repatriated contingent of the Congo.

28. Through the United Nations Mine Action Service, MINUSCA disposed of 2,867 pieces of ammunition and explosive devices and provided risk education to 12,685 beneficiaries.

Promoting and protecting human rights (including women and children)

29. The human rights situation deteriorated significantly during the reporting period. MINUSCA documented 809 human rights violations, abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law, which affected 1,173 victims, comprising 786 men, 168 women, 169 children (91 boys and 78 girls) and 50 unidentified victims. The most frequent violations were arbitrary killings, cruel and inhuman treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary detention, deprivation of liberty, abductions, attacks against schools and denial of humanitarian access.

30. The following were responsible for 540 human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law: ex-Séléka factions (299), anti-balaka factions (165), the MPC/Revolution et justice (RJ) coalition (28), LRA (9), 3R (11), RJ (3), the Front démocratique du people centrafricain (8), the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (3) and other organized self-defence armed groups (14). National security forces were responsible for 269 violations, including 244 cases of arbitrary detention, of which 160 were attributed to the national gendarmerie, 98 to the national police and 11 to the national armed forces.

31. On 30 May, MINUSCA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released the human rights mapping report on serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and humanitarian law committed from 2003 to 2015. MINUSCA organized a series of workshops with national authorities and institutions, civil society, United Nations agencies and international partners to increase national ownership of its findings.

32. The Government adopted a road map for the operationalization of the National Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Commission, which identified steps to prepare for an inclusive truth-seeking process. The Government adopted legislation

for the vetting of candidates for the defence and security forces. The National Committee for the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination continued to develop its strategy for the period 2017-2022, with MINUSCA support. MINUSCA conducted 35 workshops to raise awareness on human rights for 1,561 participants, of whom 532 were women.

33. The Mission continued to apply the United Nations human rights due diligence policy in its support for national security forces. It conducted 25 risk assessments of planned support for national internal security forces; support was authorized for 18 cases, and mitigation measures were recommended.

Conflict-related sexual violence

34. MINUSCA received reports of 55 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 53 women and 33 girls, with 43 incidents involving rape, 8 involving sexual assault and 4 involving forced marriages. The following were allegedly responsible for the highest number of incidents: ex-Séléka factions (17), the MPC/RJ coalition (11), anti-balaka factions (10) and others (17).

35. On 14 June, the Government inaugurated a rapid intervention and sexual violence prevention unit. The unit was trained and a sexual violence referral system developed, and public awareness-raising efforts were carried out in Bangui and Bouar, all with United Nations support.

Children and armed conflict

36. On 21 September, the Government ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. During the reporting period, 863 children (20 per cent of whom were girls) entered reintegration programmes led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partners, after having separated from anti-balaka (74 per cent), MPC (12 per cent) and RJ (14 per cent) armed groups.

37. On 23 September, following the issuance by FPRC of a command directive prohibiting the recruitment and use of children and ordering their separation from the group in May, the FPRC/MPC coalition formally released 74 children, including 48 girls, in Kaga Bandoro. The country task force on monitoring and reporting initiated a dialogue with self-defence groups from the PK5 district of Bangui to promote the safe and orderly release of all children, which resulted in the identification of 865 children.

B. Sustainably reducing the presence of, and the threat posed by, armed groups

Reconciliation and extension of State authority

38. MINUSCA and IOM facilitated several "peace caravans" and sensitization campaigns bringing high-level government officials to areas at risk or affected by violence for direct talks with the population and local officials. The Mission supported formal and ad hoc local conflict resolution and reconciliation initiatives. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), MINUSCA continued to assist the Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation in forming a nationwide network of peace and reconciliation committees; 10 were established in Bangui and in three neighbouring localities. Separately, ad hoc peace committees continued to operate in 12 locations, assisting in the de-escalation of active conflict, such as in Bangassou and Batangafo, and helped to implement

measures aimed at preventing potential crises, as in Bambari, Berberati, Kaga Bandoro and Ndélé. They helped to bridge gaps where other State structures do not exist, such as in Bria, and contributed to improvements in the lives of civilians, such as by reopening the Bambari central market.

39. The pace of the deployment of State authority remained slow, constrained by high turnover, lack of training, scarce financial and logistical resources and the security situation. The Government, with support from MINUSCA and UNDP, was developing a road map defining priority geographical areas and public and financial services with a view to restoring State authority.

40. Moderate progress was achieved in Bambari. As of September, there were 373 civil servants in the town, including teachers, health workers, magistrates and internal security forces. MINUSCA worked with partners to rehabilitate six administrative buildings.

Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation

41. Pending broad political agreement to back the implementation of the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, the Government launched a pilot project on 30 August. A total of 230 project participants from 14 armed groups will be reintegrated into civilian life, and 230 will be trained by the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic for integration into the national armed forces. The project's disarmament and demobilization phase for Bangui was completed on 7 September, with 140 combatants from eight armed groups participating.

42. Community violence reduction programmes continued at the community level through the engagement of ineligible combatants. In Bangui, 1,900 beneficiaries participated in vocational and agricultural training. In Ouham-Pendé prefecture, 7,000 beneficiaries, including almost 5,000 women, engaged in labour-intensive community projects. In June, pre-disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes were transformed into community violence reduction initiatives such as longer-term income-generating activities, supporting more than 4,000 ex-combatants, including 737 women.

43. During the reporting period, 162 items of unexploded ordnance and 425 rounds of small arms ammunition collected through the pre-disarmament, demobilization an reintegration process were destroyed.

Security sector reform

44. Significant progress was achieved with the signing of a national defence plan by President Touadera on 11 September. The plan foresees a 9,800-strong defence force by 2021, drawing from the existing workforce of 8,548, which will itself be reduced through vetting and retirement. National authorities resumed the simplified verification process. During the reporting period, 2,437 members of the Central African armed forces were verified, for a total of nearly 5,800 personnel verified to date; more than 800 were found to be eligible for retirement. The plan envisages a garrison-based army and the organization of the armed forces into four military zones. In addition, it includes a new concept for the employment of the armed forces.

45. The Ministry of Defence drafted a plan for the deployment of armed forces battalions trained by the European Union Military Training Mission, with the support of the Training Mission and MINUSCA, although a number of critical aspects required to reach a sufficient level of effectiveness, such as logistical and operational support, had yet to be defined. On 12 June, President Touadera

inaugurated the new armed forces training centre in Bouar, which had been rehabilitated by MINUSCA.

46. MINUSCA continued to support the management of weapons and ammunition through training and the completion of seven infrastructure projects. A road map for the operationalization of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons was adopted by national authorities on 11 July.

47. The Ministers of Defence and the Interior signed a decree on 31 August, selecting 250 candidates for recruitment as police officers and 250 for recruitment as gendarmerie officers, with MINUSCA support. Following assessments, 700 candidates (23 per cent of whom were women) were shortlisted, representing all regions except Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures, where recent violence had prevented assessments. The quota for candidates from those prefectures will be increased for the 2018 recruitment effort. MINUSCA supported the screening process.

Rule of law and efforts to combat impunity

48. Progress was made in operationalizing the Special Criminal Court with support from MINUSCA and UNDP. Seven out of the 11 international and national magistrates to lead investigation and prosecution activities were deployed. The Special Prosecutor began to develop the prosecutorial strategy, in consultation with ordinary courts and the International Criminal Court, and the victim and witness programme. Twenty judicial police officers and the deputy international registrar were selected and are awaiting nomination. Although funding has been secured for the initial operationalization of the Court, a significant gap remains in terms of ensuring that it can sustain investigations and prosecutions until the end of 2019.

49. Using its urgent temporary measures, MINUSCA apprehended 48 alleged perpetrators of, inter alia, incitement to hatred, illegal possession of firearms and criminal conspiracy. At the request of the Government, and owing to the lack of judicial and penitentiary infrastructure outside the capital, MINUSCA supported the transfer of 32 of those apprehended to prison facilities in Bangui, although those facilities remain significantly overcrowded. The Ngaragba central prison and its annex at Camp de Roux are at 196 per cent and 145 per cent, respectively, of capacity. MINUSCA provided advice on investigations and judicial proceedings against those 32 individuals, as well as against 13 FPRC members who had been indicted in March on counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

50. MINUSCA and UNDP jointly supported efforts to improve access to justice and the deployment by the Ministry of Justice of magistrates throughout the country. Fourteen courts were operational outside Bangui. The security situation prevented the redeployment of judicial actors in the east. National authorities endorsed the national strategy on legal aid and finalized the review of the draft law on legal aid, with the support of MINUSCA and UNDP. A third legal aid clinic was opened in Bossangoa, in addition to those in Bangui and Bria.

51. Prison officials at Ngarabga prison and its annex at Camp de Roux prevented or managed several major incidents, including a large prison disturbance, a planned hostage-taking and a mass escape, benefiting from the Mission's monitoring and training. The Government developed an outreach strategy for 300 national corrections recruits, with MINUSCA support, as part of its efforts to demilitarize national prisons.

Natural resources management

52. The Government began to develop a national strategy for the establishment of a multisectoral coordination mechanism to combat the illicit trafficking of natural resources, with MINUSCA support. Within the framework of the Kimberley Process, an independent auditor for the inspection of diamond stockpiles was designated, while the Government took steps to strengthen the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Resources.

C. Coordination of international assistance and the Mutual Engagement Framework

53. The Government established mechanisms for the implementation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and the Mutual Engagement Framework, as well as a technical committee chaired by the Prime Minister. The two remaining technical-level coordination groups, for the second pillar (the social contract) and the third pillar (economic recovery) of the Plan, became operational in June and July, respectively. The first pillar (peace, security and reconciliation) has implemented 33 per cent of its strategic activities to date. The steering committee, chaired by President Touadera, met on 19 July and 11 September to assess progress, including the provision of support to Bambari, and took action on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration pilot project and on the equipping and redeployment of the Central African armed forces.

54. Out of the $2.28 billion pledged at the Brussels Conference in November 2016, 87 per cent of the funds were confirmed for the period 2017-2019. The anticipated rate of the delivery of those funds is currently 21 per cent, reflecting challenges to the State's implementation capacity.

IV. Humanitarian situation

55. The humanitarian situation deteriorated significantly during the reporting period, with an increased number of people in need over a wider geographical area. Armed clashes engulfed territories that had been relatively stable, including Basse-Kotto, Haut-Mbomou and Mbomou; 14 of the 16 provinces hosted people in need of assistance. The upsurge in violence caused the number of internally displaced persons in the country in 2017 to increase by 50 per cent (200,000), bringing the total to almost 600,000 at 84 sites and with host families. The number of refugees surpassed 500,000, bringing the total of people displaced — internally or abroad — to more than 1.1 million, the highest ever recorded for the country.

56. Half of Central Africans, 2.4 million in total, require humanitarian assistance, representing one of the highest proportions of those in need per capita worldwide. Nearly 1.1 million people require food assistance across the country. Humanitarian partners continue to assist some 700,000 persons, including some 400,000 internally displaced people, through general food distributions, nutritional interventions and early recovery initiatives. Global acute malnutrition has reached critical levels.

57. Despite the staggering needs, humanitarian activities remain severely underfunded. As at 18 September, only 30 per cent of the revised Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 had been funded, despite sustained efforts to mobilize donors.

58. The Central African Republic continues to be one of the most dangerous places to work for humanitarian actors, who have been frequently targeted by armed

groups. As at 18 September, 11 humanitarian workers had been killed in armed attacks.

59. The deterioration in the security situation has led to the shrinking of humanitarian space in the country. This requires an increase in assistance by air and the creation of hubs and surge teams that are quickly deployable to improve responsiveness to nascent crises.

V. Socioeconomic developments

60. During the reporting period, mounting insecurity disrupted farming activities and cattle-breeding, which may result in a setback compared with 2016 figures. Growth has the potential to improve during the 2017 rainy season as a result of steady investment in agriculture, especially in certain rural areas near Bangui that are deemed stable. Manufacturing industries experienced a shaky rebound, showing an 11 per cent increase in the production of cigarettes and 2.8 per cent increases in the manufacturing of household goods and in brewery production. As a result of the reopening of the cotton-processing factory in Bossangoa in February, a promising horizon is forecast for cotton producers.

VI. Mandate renewal

61. Given the forthcoming end of the current MINUSCA mandate period, and pursuant to resolution 2301 (2016), the Secretariat and the Mission conducted an assessment in the light of the evolving context, with a view to developing recommendations on the mandate for the succeeding period for the Security Council's consideration. The assessment found that, since late 2016, the security situation had progressively deteriorated outside Bangui, with growing sectarian violence and a heightened risk of ethnic cleansing in parts of the country. The violence had unfolded despite the launch of a number of peace initiatives and Government-led efforts to implement the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration agreement reached at the Bangui Forum. The lack of coherence between various peace initiatives had limited the ability to create an inclusive political process in which the grievances of armed groups could be addressed.

62. Competition over the control of territory and access to natural resources, as well as power-sharing aspirations, had led to a further fragmentation of armed groups and a proliferation of armed self-defence groups. The spreading use of incendiary rhetoric had heightened the risk of mass atrocities. The Muslim population was increasingly stigmatized as "foreign". The dynamics of the conflict, previously characterized by clashes between armed groups, were now exacerbated by growing intercommunal violence along ethnic and religious lines. The violence had expanded geographically, particularly to the south-east, a region hitherto spared from conflict. The evolving nature of the conflict had exacted a heavy toll on civilians, humanitarian actors and MINUSCA, which had suffered increased attacks, with 12 peacekeepers killed as a result of hostile acts since January.

63. During the reporting period, MINUSCA was largely successful in implementing its mandate to protect civilians, particularly by securing Bambari. It made some progress towards reducing the presence and the threat of armed groups, as previously reported. However, changing conflict dynamics and the geographical spread of violence and attacks on civilians exposed the limits of the overall political and operational response of MINUSCA, including its mobile and robust posture. The Mission's efforts to adapt to the evolving situation were compromised by the spiralling violence owing to the lack of a comprehensive peace agreement or

another form of political arrangement between the Government and armed groups. This, compounded by the lack of national capacity and ownership, compromised the sustainability of MINUSCA efforts in many areas, particularly disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the extension of State authority. The fact that the Mission's resources were already over-engaged hampered its ability to simultaneously prevent and respond to all incidents in a widening geographical area, while holding ground that it had previously stabilized.

64. In the light of the above, MINUSCA should prioritize its efforts in some areas under a renewed mandate, while streamlining and making adjustments in others. It should focus on its core peacekeeping tasks and prioritize support for the national and local political process, augment its capacity to protect civilians and facilitate the creation of a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Mission should streamline its other mandated tasks and/or adjust how it implements them. The leveraging of the comparative advantages of MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and other partners would be a particularly effective way to facilitate such changes.

65. A stronger security strategy is essential to support the political process, degrade threats, prevent further conflict and better protect civilians. Such a strategy should seek to continue to optimize the current uniformed capabilities of MINUSCA, including by further improving performance, flexibility and mobility, while seeking an increase in the Mission's authorized troop ceiling to shore up the strategy. MINUSCA should use its urgent temporary measures proactively and enhance support for investigations and prosecutions, while reporting to the Security Council on any obstruction to the effective implementation of those measures.

Recommended tasks under a renewed mandate

Good offices and support for the peace process

66. The adoption of the road map for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, under national leadership and with the support of all key stakeholders, offers an opportunity for more coherent, effective support for the peace process. It is therefore recommended that MINUSCA, through its good offices, enhance its support for inclusive political dialogue, in partnership with the African Union and under the leadership of the Government. To that end, the Mission should work with the members of the Initiative and other mediation actors to support the Government's efforts at the national and local levels and the increased participation of political parties, civil society and women. This should be backed by a stronger communications strategy on the part of the Government to engage the population. Together with partners, MINUSCA should help to ensure that national and local processes provide a framework for new security and political arrangements, which could include ceasefires, disarmament and administrative mechanisms that reflect the country's diversity. In a context of growing intercommunal violence, MINUSCA should promote a greater focus on national reconciliation and support local conflict resolution. The Mission should also be mandated to monitor and report on public incidents of incitement to hatred, intolerance and violence, which could be supported through the strengthening of the sanctions regime to hold accountable the instigators of political violence and those obstructing the political process.

67. MINUSCA should support national authorities in addressing transitional justice as part of the peace and reconciliation process. This could include the provision of advice on the design and implementation of comprehensive, gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms based on human rights principles. It could

also integrate various ongoing efforts in the justice area, including the Special Criminal Court and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation committee.

68. MINUSCA, in coordination with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), should continue to seek the sustained support of the subregion for the peace process by proactively engaging neighbouring countries and subregional organizations. MINUSCA and UNOCA should also continue to work with subregional partners to address cross-border security issues, including the illegal flows of small arms and weapons.

Protection of civilians

69. The protection of civilians, including, as needed, through the use of force, will remain a priority task. The Mission should enhance early warning and upstream prevention, including for pre-emptive operations. If emerging threats are identified, the Mission should also deploy temporary multidisciplinary teams to respond and reinforce local capacity for conflict resolution. Taking into account governmental responsibility for protecting civilians, the role of other partners, and the limited capacity of any peacekeeping operation to protect civilians throughout a country, MINUSCA should ensure that political and security strategies for the protection of civilians involve the Government, relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other partners, also as part of an overall strategy for the progressive transfer to national authorities of the responsibility to protect civilians, including the provision of security. MINUSCA should accelerate the gradual transition of its security functions to national forces where the security situation permits and without prejudice to its mandate to protect civilians, and also as a way to project force and greater security across a larger part of the country and as a key component of the Mission's eventual exit.

Extension of State authority, including the rule of law

70. MINUSCA should continue to support the Government in implementing the latter's strategy for the extension of State authority. In the light of the evolving context, the need for sustainable efforts, and the Mission's priorities, MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and relevant partners should articulate a clear division of labour based on mandates and comparative advantage. This would allow MINUSCA to focus on immediate-, short- and medium-term priorities, while handing over responsibility for longer-term activities to relevant partners. MINUSCA should continue to support the Special Criminal Court, while reinforcing the capacities of ordinary courts and police to address serious crimes. It should also reduce the scope of its activities by sequencing its efforts on priorities and in targeted geographical areas where it can have the greatest impact, taking into account sustainability, the presence of other partners, and lessons learned in Bambari.

71. MINUSCA should provide advice to the Government on interim security and administrative arrangements that are acceptable to the population and under government oversight. The aim should be to reduce the number of armed confrontations, enhance the protection of civilians and help to strengthen or restore State authority where it is weak or non-existent.

Security sector reform

72. At the normative and strategic levels, MINUSCA should prioritize support for the establishment of a superior council of national security and stronger parliamentary oversight. At the operational level, the recently adopted national defence plan provides a strategic framework for the rebuilding of the Central

African armed forces. The draft concept of the deployment of armed forces battalions trained by the European Union Military Training Mission establishes a framework for coordination between national authorities and international stakeholders. On those bases, MINUSCA should explore providing further support to these trained units of the armed forces, taking into account operational and protection imperatives and as an element of its exit strategy. Such support could be facilitated through a memorandum of understanding or similar arrangement, aimed at enabling the forces to reach a sufficient level of operational capability as quickly as possible. The details and mechanisms should be identified by MINUSCA together with the Government, the European Union and other relevant partners, particularly donors, taking into account the forces' lack of equipment and sustainment.

73. Support provided to the Central African armed forces should be implemented in accordance with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy. MINUSCA support must also be accompanied by concrete commitments on the part of national civilian and military authorities that they will ensure that such deployments are sustainable, do not pose a risk to the stabilization of the country, to civilians or to the political process, and will strengthen government oversight and command and control. It will also require greater commitment to transform the armed forces into an ethnically representative and geographically balanced army. The Government, MINUSCA and the European Union Military Training Mission should formulate detailed benchmarks, with timelines, for the gradual deployment of the trained units. MINUSCA should also support the Government in strengthening the institutional capacity of the national police and gendarmerie, in accordance with the five-year capacity-building and development plan for internal security forces (2016-2020), particularly command and control structures and oversight mechanisms, as well as support the deployment of the police and gendarmerie in priority areas, including through co-location, advice, mentoring and monitoring, in coordination with other partners such as the European Union, the United Nations country team and bilateral partners.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

74. In the light of increased intercommunal violence and the proliferation of self-defence groups, MINUSCA should focus on gender-sensitive community violence reduction projects in close coordination with development partners. It should implement disarmament, demobilization and reintegration projects only where feasible, as an incentive to armed groups to remain engaged in the political process and in preparation for the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

Promotion and protection of human rights

75. While carrying out its current mandate, MINUSCA, with the United Nations country team, should support the Government in following up on the recommendations set out in the human rights mapping report and its use by the Special Criminal Court to inform national and international strategies and actions to fight impunity.

Natural resources management

76. In recognition of the continued critical importance of addressing natural resources as a conflict driver and of the harnessing by the Government of its revenue and tax base, the Mission should exercise its comparative advantages in tackling the illicit exploitation of natural resources as part of a broader strategy, the development of which should be led by the Government and its main development partners.

Military component

77. As indicated in paragraph 27 above, the Mission has taken steps to optimize its deployment in response to the increased needs arising from the deteriorating security situation. In addition, MINUSCA is taking and will continue to take robust measures to enhance performance. All of the Mission's military resources are fully engaged, which has left it with no spare military capacity and no further avenues for reconstituting reserves or addressing current and emerging hotspots within its current troop ceiling. MINUSCA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations reviewed the Mission's military capabilities using the updated threat and conflict analysis, determining that it required a minimum of six additional infantry companies in the current context.

78. I therefore recommend an increase of 900 military personnel. The proposed additional personnel would comprise (a) two infantry companies (300 troops) to reinforce the military footprint of two battalions in the east and the centre; and (b) one battalion (600 troops) in the centre and the east as part of the Force Commander's reserve.

79. In practical terms, the additional troops and capabilities would not allow MINUSCA to protect all civilians in the country. They would, however, provide the force with greater flexibility to rapidly deploy available troops to address threats posed to civilians in priority geographical areas, while reinforcing its pre-emptive and reactive postures, particularly in the centre and the south-east, which are areas of heightened threat to civilians. The reinforcement of existing battalions would give the force more room to manoeuvre with respect to the tasking and employment of troops, particularly in priority geographical areas, by freeing up the special forces and the quick-reaction force for more proactive operations, and would increase its ability to shape and influence security situations, rather than react to them. In the medium to longer term, the impact of the additional troops would be threefold. After containing the security situation, the Mission would work to reverse it by regaining balance and initiative vis-a-vis the armed groups. This would enhance its ability to hold ground in areas cleared of armed groups and expand its coverage. Second, the Mission would help create conditions allowing the political process to unfold by reducing gains from armed group activity. Finally, the force would help to create favourable conditions for the deployment of State administration and the delivery of services in priority areas, as well as the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Police component

80. To support the redeployed national police and gendarmerie, MINUSCA should seek to increase its formed police footprint outside Bangui, particularly in Berberati and Bossangoa. This would help to protect civilians and facilitate the gradual return of internally displaced persons and refugees. To do so, MINUSCA should accelerate the handover of security for key officials and the static guard duties of national institutions in Bangui to national defence and security forces. This should be complemented by converting one protection support unit into a formed police unit. As the security situation evolves, the Mission should review the established command-and-control structure of the joint task force in order to enhance the operational performance of police contingents. A rebalancing of the strength of the military and police components should eventually be considered if the security situation allows.

VII. Deployment of the Mission

A. Military (including capacities)

81. As at 5 October, MINUSCA had deployed 10,658 military personnel (99 per cent of the authorized strength of 10,750), comprising 11 infantry battalions, a special forces company, a quick-reaction force company, an unmanned aerial vehicle unit and several enabling units, namely, a military police company, four engineering companies, a heavy-transport company, three level II hospitals, a signal company and three helicopter units, including a combat helicopter unit. Women constituted 2 per cent of military personnel. Troop-contributing countries continued to improve the equipment of their respective contingents and self-sustainment. The multiplying hotspots, however, had led to a proliferation of temporary and permanent operating bases, which had weakened the troops' projected strength. The Mission had developed night-capable helicopter landing sites in Bambari, Bangassou, Berberati, Bossangoa, Bria, Ndélé and Paoua, in addition to the two already in Bangui.

B. Police

82. As at 5 October, MINUSCA had deployed 1,968 police personnel (94.61 per cent of the authorized strength of 2,080), comprising 295 individual police officers (73.75 per cent of the authorized strength of 400, owing largely to difficulties in generating specialized recruitment profiles) and 12 formed police units, comprising 1,673 personnel (99.58 per cent of the authorized strength of 1,680), including 103 women. A total of 81 individual police officers were deployed in 10 locations outside Bangui, while four formed police units were deployed in Bambari, Bouar, Bria and Kaga Bandoro, respectively, and half of a formed police unit was temporarily deployed in Bangassou.

C. Civilian personnel

83. As at 5 October, MINUSCA had deployed 1,386 civilian personnel (79 per cent of a total of 1,747 authorized positions (798 international, 695 national and 254 United Nations Volunteer)). Women constituted 24 per cent of civilian personnel overall and 21 per cent of such personnel in senior positions at the P-5 level or above. The recruitment and retention of female staff, including United Nations Volunteers, remains extremely challenging.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

84. During the reporting period, MINUSCA continued to deal with issues related to the implementation of the status-of-forces agreement, including with the Central African customs office on the import of goods and materials for the Mission and national telecommunications officials, who had attempted to impose fees on the issuance of toll-free telephone numbers. Those issues were resolved through communication on a regular basis between the Mission and the Government, including by way of an established status-of-forces working group led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reimbursement to the United Nations of fuel taxes that had been imposed on MINUSCA and United Nations agencies in 2015 and 2016, contrary to the agreement, was accepted by the Government, which

acknowledged that the fees paid constituted charges from which MINUSCA and United Nations agencies were exempted.

VIII. Safety and security of United Nations staff

85. The security situation remained challenging for all categories of United Nations personnel. Demonstrations and carjackings took place in Bangui and the surrounding area during the reporting period. Across the country in recent months, both national and international personnel received kidnapping threats. Armed actors directly targeted United Nations premises and convoys, particularly in the south-east and the centre. During the reporting period, 154 of the recorded security incidents directly involved United Nations personnel, including 10 peacekeepers who lost their lives (4 as a result of hostile activities, 3 owing to accidents, 2 reportedly as a result of suicide and 1 as a result of illness) and 16 who were seriously injured (12 as a result of hostile activities and 4 owing to accidents). Many attacks were committed against humanitarian workers, and United Nations personnel were relocated for extended periods because of elevated risk levels.

IX. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

86. There was a progressive reduction in the number of allegations made during the reporting period, with 4 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by MINUSCA forces being made, compared with 14 in the previous period. The four allegations are currently pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing country and the United Nations. MINUSCA, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and implementing partners, enhanced prevention efforts and the implementation of the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy by conducting ongoing risk assessments and implementing mitigating measures, promoting strict non-fraternization policies and continued training for all personnel as well as journalists and governmental and non-governmental organizations. MINUSCA has conducted a refresher training programme for its immediate response team, which is able to respond quickly to reports of sexual exploitation and abuse and gather and preserve evidence pending investigation. The Mission has also established an emergency action team on sexual exploitation and abuse to provide advice, monitor and implement immediate actions. In addition to the process led by United Nations Headquarters under Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), by the end of the first quarter of 2018, MINUSCA will conduct a critical assessment of the effectiveness and performance of troops, to examine whether there are linkages between their performance and conduct. With regard to support for victims, MINUSCA established a network of 36 humanitarian organizations to receive complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and established a Mission-wide emergency action team to advise on and monitor the implementation of immediate remedies. MINUSCA established victim assistance protocols with service providers, including UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund, to ensure that all victims are supported and assisted within 24 to 72 hours of the receipt of an allegation, including through counselling and emergency medical assistance. On 23 July, the Secretary-General appointed Jane Connors as Victims' Rights Advocate to strengthen the assistance provided by the United Nations system and its partners, as well as access to justice for victims, including in the Central African Republic.

X. Financial aspects

87. The General Assembly, by its resolution 71/299, appropriated the amount of $882.8 million for the maintenance of MINUSCA for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. As at 18 September 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINUSCA amounted to $196.3 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $2,799.0 million. Reimbursement of troop and formed police costs has been made for the period up to 31 July 2017, while reimbursement of the cost of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

XI. Observations and recommendations

88. Following the end of the political transition more than a year ago, the Central African Republic had seemed to be recovering steadily from its deep crisis. It is tragic that the deterioration in the security situation in recent months, particularly in the south-east, has put the country back into a cycle of violence, despite the efforts of many to prevent the conflict from escalating. Civilians have suffered the brunt of that violence. Entire communities have been torn apart. Armed groups have fragmented and expanded their areas of control. Intercommunal tensions have risen, fuelled by a broad, deliberate campaign of misinformation designed to inflame communities and undermine peace and stability. If this trend continues, there is a serious risk that the situation will worsen, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the people, the country and the subregion. This would be unacceptable.

89. The window of opportunity for reversing this senseless spiral of violence and hatred is rapidly shrinking. Seizing it demands urgent, decisive and coherent action on the part of all stakeholders, particularly national ones. It is in this context that I co-chaired, with President Touadera and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and in partnership with ECCAS, the European Union and the World Bank, the high-level meeting on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, held on the margins of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly. It provided President Touadera with an opportunity to articulate his strong determination to bridge internal divides and take immediate actions, in partnership with the international community, to prevent the country from sliding back into full-blown conflict.

90. I welcome the steps taken by President Touadera to overcome political divisions in the lead-up to the high-level meeting. Those efforts must rapidly be translated into tangible reductions in violence and bring all Central Africans together to chart a path to peace. I would recall the responsibility of all national stakeholders and institutions to prevent conflict, protect civilians and work in unison to promote inclusivity and advance reconciliation. Political stakeholders must put their people and country before opportunistic interests.

91. I am shocked at the continued use of hateful discourse, aimed at provoking sectarian violence, by those who should be working to heal the nation's wounds and prevent further violence. I am equally troubled by the continued activities of armed and criminal groups that prey on civilians and destroy their country. This is shameful and must stop. I hope that the Security Council will take decisive action to hold accountable those who are inciting violence and hatred and obstructing the peace process. Communities themselves must set aside their differences, recalling our shared humanity, and reject those who espouse hateful discourse. In addition,

members of armed groups and others must immediately honour their pledges to cease hostilities and attacks on civilians, end forced displacement and stop using arms to secure political and economic gains.

92. Support from the international community, including the United Nations, will never be successful without the full, unified commitment and engagement of Central African authorities at all levels. Central Africans hold the primary responsibility for peace and stability in their country. Time is of the essence. I therefore call on the President, his Government and all Central Africans to seize the momentum generated by the high-level meeting to strengthen their ownership of the peace and recovery process, improve governance and accelerate the delivery of tangible peace dividends. The United Nations will continue to lend its full support to such efforts, but cannot and should not replace the role of Central Africans themselves.

93. I am hopeful that the launch of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and the formation of its panel of facilitators will reinvigorate the peace process. The United Nations stands ready to support the Initiative. I call on the Government of the Central African Republic and members of the Initiative to accelerate their efforts, while ensuring that peace efforts are as inclusive as possible, with the participation not only of armed groups, but of all sectors of society. I wish to reaffirm the determination of the United Nations to work in partnership with the African Union, under the leadership of the Government, to secure local and national agreements that contribute to the stabilization of the security situation, the extension and restoration of State authority, and more inclusive and accountable governance mechanisms.

94. The renewed momentum for the building of genuine and inclusive dialogue must be accompanied by adequate security. While national authorities, supported by international partners, have made notable progress, the State remains absent from large portions of the territory. The escalation and spread of armed confrontations and violence across the country has often left MINUSCA overstretched and thinly dispersed, unable to respond to emerging security demands, thus allowing space for armed groups to proliferate and foment further conflict. MINUSCA has made considerable efforts to adjust its posture and deployments and generate additional capacities within its ceiling. The Mission has reached its limit. Increasing the troop ceiling will facilitate a more effective response in some areas. The Mission will also continue to take appropriate measures to increase the performance and robustness of the force. However, a word of caution: a peacekeeping operation cannot replace a State or stabilize an entire country alone. It is a shared undertaking between all national actors and international partners.

95. The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and the Mutual Engagement Framework will remain at the centre of the engagement of the United Nations system. The Mission will continue to engage national authorities to implement the national strategy for security sector reform and promote an inclusive, nationally led reform process. I welcome the progress made in selecting the 500 police and gendarmerie officers and call on national authorities to sustain their efforts to build and deploy an effective police and gendarmerie force that bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order.

96. I am encouraged by the progress made in adopting a framework for the gradual reoperationalization of the national armed forces. I urge national authorities to take the measures necessary to ensure that their redeployment outside Bangui does not constitute a threat to the population or the political process. This will require improved capacity to sustain and command security forces in the field and to transform them into ethnically representative and geographically balanced forces. I welcome the launch of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration pilot

project, with the support of the European Union Military Training Mission, as an important confidence-building measure for the political process, the reduction of violence and the eventual launch of the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme. I welcome the support provided by the Training Mission in the area of defence sector reform and encourage the international community to increase support for the further strengthening of the national armed forces.

97. The need for justice, and the demand of Central Africans to end impunity as expressed at the Bangui Forum, need to be clearly articulated to ensure accountability for the gravest crimes and redress for victims. Transitional justice mechanisms should form part of the peace process to strengthen national cohesion and reconciliation. I urge national authorities to develop a vision of transitional justice that incorporates the various ongoing efforts in this area, including those relating to the Special Criminal Court and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation committee. MINUSCA will enhance its efforts to arrest those most responsible for obstructing the peace process as well as those who have committed the most serious crimes against civilians and international actors.

98. Unless it is accompanied by early recovery, economic and development initiatives, as promoted in the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, progress in stabilizing the security situation will remain fragile. It is critical that international partners remain engaged in support of national authorities at a time of competing demands and scarce resources. The international community must not disengage at this crucial juncture. As efforts to protect civilians and advance the political process continue, recovery efforts are more important than ever for the sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their areas of origin and to give a chance to a new generation of Central Africans to envision a future free from violence.

99. I am appalled by the continued attacks on peacekeepers and aid workers, both international and national. I condemn in the strongest terms the cowardly attacks that killed 4 peacekeepers and wounded 12. Those attacks constitute serious crimes under international law, and I call for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

100. The humanitarian situation in the country is of grave concern. I cannot stress enough the importance of the full engagement of the international community to support efforts of the United Nations system and humanitarian partners to address it. Available resources are limited. Current funding gaps must be urgently addressed in order to attend to the most basic needs of a growing segment of the population. The increasing obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid in parts of the country are simply unacceptable. I call on Central African authorities and particularly the armed groups to ensure that humanitarian actors are granted safe and unhindered access to all parts of the country.

101. On the basis of the findings outlined in the present report, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of MINUSCA for a period of one year, until 15 November 2018, with an authorized troop ceiling of 11,650 military personnel, including 480 military observers and staff officers, an authorized strength of 2,080 police personnel, including 400 individual police officers and 1,680 formed police unit personnel, and 108 corrections officers.

102. I also recommend that MINUSCA focus on its core peacekeeping tasks by prioritizing its support for the political process at all levels, while augmenting its capacity to protect civilians and facilitate the creation of a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Therefore, I recommend that the Security Council prioritize, streamline, adjust and augment the mandate of MINUSCA as described in paragraphs 66 to 80 above. The political and conflict prevention

approach reflected in those recommendations requires an equivalent augmentation of the Mission's security strategy. This will not by itself guarantee the full protection of civilians throughout the country. It is aimed at enabling the Mission to enhance its capacity to prevent a further deterioration in the security situation while creating space for the political process to advance.

103. MINUSCA must also continue to work towards improving its own accountability and to implement the United Nations zero-tolerance policy with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse. Progress was achieved with a reduction in the number of allegations. I urge the Mission to continually improve its efforts to prevent, deter and punish acts of sexual exploitation and abuse and to take all measures possible to care for victims.

104. There have been many attempts to address the cycle of violence. It is my view that if we stay the course, with a committed national leadership to advance inclusive politics and responsible good governance and a well-coordinated and coherent international response, the country will have a real chance to prevent a further relapse into violence and to sustain peace. The Central African Republic must seize the opportunity provided by the ongoing joint peace initiative under the broad umbrella of the Mutual Engagement Framework and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan to address the root causes of its long-term fragility.

105. I am grateful to my Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his unwavering dedication and leadership. I am deeply appreciative to the personnel of MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and the troop- and police-contributing countries for their dedication to the cause of peace in a highly challenging environment. I am also grateful to my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, François Louncény Fall, for his role in the subregion in support of the Central African Republic. I thank the African Union, ECCAS, the European Union, the World Bank, international partners and non-governmental organizations for their continued efforts to work with Central Africans towards a better future.

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